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Writing Sample

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Includes "My Place of Wintering," "Button," "Tarantino," "Sailor," "The Animal Heart Feels Cold," "Tree," and "Beyond."

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Alexandra PETROVA

My Place of Wintering

* * * *

My place of wintering, of breeding
nomading, shooting
high grass, unmown
the shade of woods, circles under eyes –
unreckoned, unqueried.

Swept here, flotsamed, swiped
hurled on the cobbles
tigred, bruised, slashed.

No more answering by rote, no set speeches, - the limit.
Trumpeters ahead: get up, rise into the nameless horde,
to crumble, like plaster then, on road and pasture.

My nesting place, Italy, my resting place.

Translated from the Russian by Lena Lenchek

Button

* * * *

A button you say?
No, everything that could fell off.
Lips are cracked, eyes swollen with salt,
not from the Dead Sea, but the inner sea, the live one.

The pendulum of dawn swings up to seven.
Inevitably, the aroma of coffee stretches up and out.
People slip on their roller skates and leave, perhaps for good.
The shoemaker will make a pair for me, once we have the money.

Doors bang. The sugar of hallway smiles clinks.
They linger around the foyer before flying off the frame of the foggy morning.
But you enter the dense daily cycle
and the water pushes you back.

So, Smerdiakov, do you still stink inside me?
Why don't you let me go
into the European world of workers up at daybreak?
What do you want from me?

Russian wolves are caged in my cells,
docile slaves of needles and pills.
Pestalozzi has turned up, the circus entertainer with a pistol,
to teach them how to be birds on branches in blossom
and to recite by heart the *vita nuova*.
Only one learned how to, but his teeth grew back.

Near the door frame a bird-child is laughing,
its feathers caught in a vast fold of linen.
Sheets of air swell and flap in the wind.
Lord, do not incline my heart from Thee,
and I will open it completely.

Tarantino

* * * *

Tarantino's languor and dreaming.
The cooling hoop of Jerusalem barely pulsates.
Tarnished scales reflect the pitiless glance:
Mongrel, child of the East.
He recoiled bubbling red through the drains,
till she pumped into him one two three four slugs.

Snake will croak but in the twilight of daybreak
his rings revive and turn crimson.
Oh, Cinema Dragon, I inhale your fumes.
Shadowy bodies pour from your darkening screen
into the injection driven straight through the heart muscle.

"Recognise it?" This snake city is your brother.
Lumiere's finger twitches on the trigger.
Awaiting the night army of roaches.

Sailor

* * * *

Snow falls on the young sailor's shoulders.

Sweet sailor, say the sound of "the" with confidence –
it's something you can touch
(a friend's dimpled chin),
or catch (his eye),
or mould into memory (his smile).

He runs across the street through the pink light.
The white blaze of a restless geometry is below zero.
The red sun is on the right,
a weightless polythene moon on the left.
Barely two moon phases till the White Night.
On the Eastern stem of the wind rose compass the willow buds swell.

He crosses the street.
Or the street passes through him.
The crossing flashes.
The negative settles
in the chemical solution of desires,
in the fixative of dreams.

Sailor boy Petrov,
gold buttons,
high boots,
you are always in a hurry.

It's not safe to run down back streets in the Slavic world,
where boundary lines cannot be seen.
There are no articles to measure out the distances.
Take it – it's all yours.

They will take you, drag you away. You are no one's.
You are part of the rays,
the crisscrossed streets,
the two-voice chant of the crowd,
the shine of your buttons
radiates beams in all directions -

parading through the air
like banners and standards
they grow in the distance
and on the very edge of the water

warships stare gloomily
at the reflection of the flying flags.

The Animal Heart Feels Cold

* * * *

The animal heart feels cold.
It chills.
It's June 8.
People are hiding behind the awnings
of their silent balconies.
It's hot.
This love, so tempestuous and calm,
how come it turned out to be short?

It tightened in a split second. The snapped elastic
on shorts, or something like that.

Oh, I remember his shorts perfectly:
Green, polka dot grey,
dappled blue, sky blue.

God, help me not to think about such things.
They are cooling down.

They are cold.

Tree

* * * *

The silence of the tree is singing:
“The forest is on fire.”

I couldn’t sing along for the tears
in my speechlessness.
I, like the tailor in the Grimm Brothers,
clung to the tree trunk
(and held an iron to weigh myself
down against the wind).

“Memory, it seems, outweighs
even cast-iron.
But memory is a mold, a measure, a thing,
and you are what you were not.
The fire and the wind have taken
everything dearest
leaving in exchange sand and ash”.

This is what the tree sings.

Beyond

* * * *

beyond the horizon of that bridge,
where nothing is simply as it seems,
grass, give me the power of grass,
and I will say: I come against ye!
It's time, I'll say to myself,
isn't that right?
Look, the wind will catch a spent flag of leaves.
Get up, I will say to myself, despair, and if you want, die.
Just don't be silent now, please, speak.
This is new,
it will be a new life,
there, beyond the bridge,
over the bridge,
we are never coming back to this place,
I promise you,
grass,
never,
nev

Translated from the Russian by Rachel Smith